

University of Pennsylvania

Essay

on *Sept 2 March 12 1829*

Menstruation

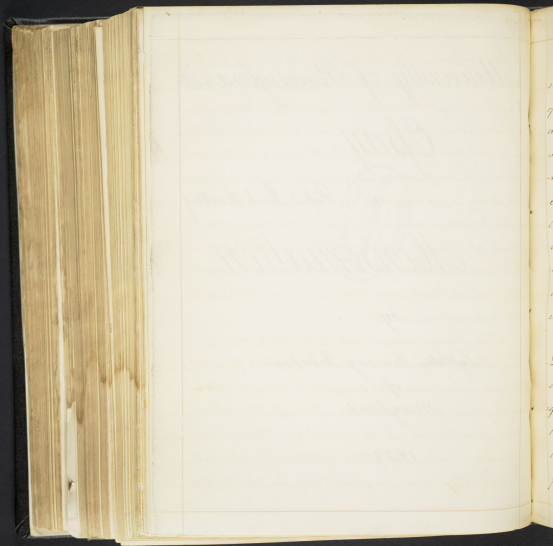
by

Lyttleton Murray Robertson

of

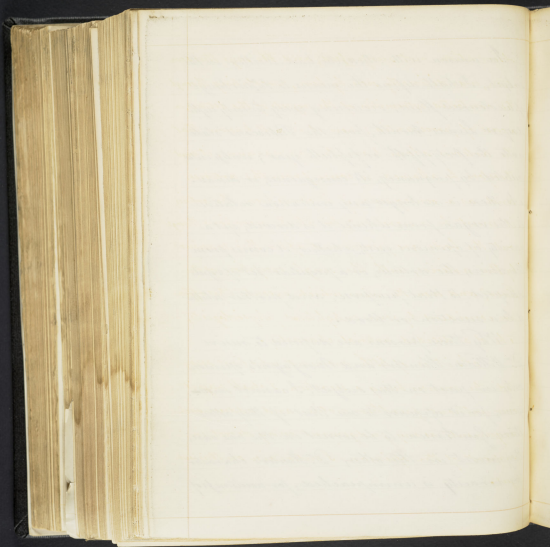
Maryland

1829



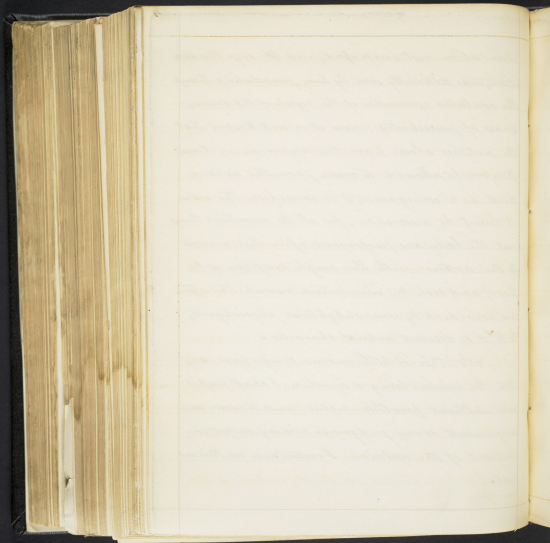
In unison with those who have written on this subject, I shall define the menses to be discharge of a coloured fluid, occurring every twenty eighth day or lunar month, from the Pubescent state unto the forty fifth or fiftieth year; unless interrupted by pregnancy, its consequences, or disease. As there is no longer any contention relative to the organ from whence it is derived, yet a variety of opinions exists, whether it comes from the veins, the arteries, or a peculiar set of vessels adapted to that purpose, and further whether it be a secretion or blood.

Why those persons are disposed to receive Dr. William Hunter's and Morgagni's opinion only in part on this subject, I cannot imagine, for it appears to me that if they allow those Gentlemen to be correct in the one case, they must in the other. Dr. Hunter's character for veracity is unimpeached, for acuteness of



observation not surpassed, and He says this secretion, was distinctly seen by him, percolating through the contorted extremities of the vessels of the uterus, in a case of puerperia; now it is well known that the arteries alone have this appearance, it must therefore be allowed to come from the arteries, and as a consequence, if it comes from the arteries it must be a secretion, for all the secretions throughout the body are performed after this manner by the arteries, with the single exception of the Liver, and even the veins which execute this office are considered by some enlightened physiologists, to be of a decided arterial character.

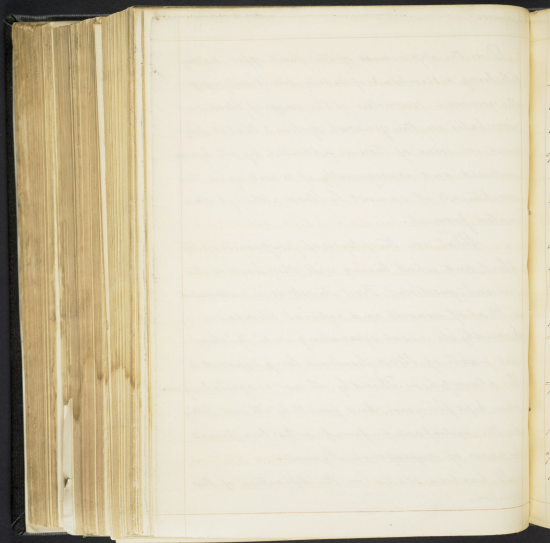
As it is of little moment, who first suggested the menses being a secretion, I shall pass it over without further notice and address such arguments as my judgement may direct, in support of the opinion I entertain on this subject.



Does the appearance of this fluid offer no proof of its being a secretion? if so why does it not possess the common properties of the mass of blood as it circulates in the general system? that it is deficient in some of these is admitted by all has been induced and consequently if wanting in these constituents it cannot be blood although claimed from it.

What are the physical properties of this fluid, and what having will they have on the present question? First its colour is intermediate to that of venous and arterial blood, *secondly* its never separating into the elemental parts of blood however long exposed to the atmosphere, *thirdly* its not coagulating even when kept for years, And *fourthly* its not taking on the putrefactive process as has been proved by cases of imperforate hymen.

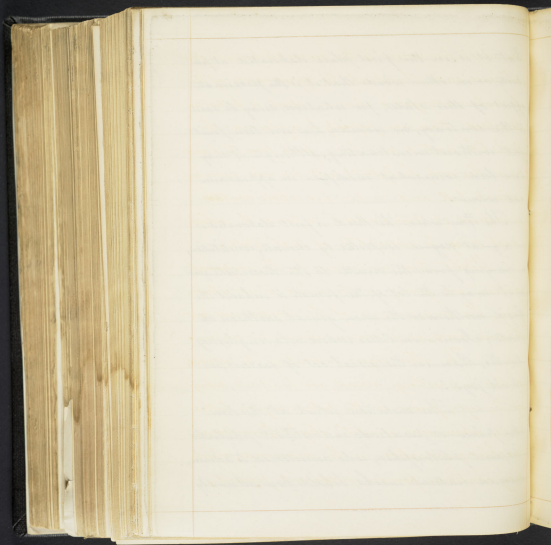
It has been stated in the definition of this secretion,



that it is in the first place elaborated at puberty, or in other words that it is the proximate effect of this state, for whatever may be said to the contrary, no woman has ever been fruitful without menstruating, although it may have been somewhat modified in appearance and colour.

The time when this fluid is first elaborated is in a great degree controlled by climate, constitution, &c. varying from the month to the twentieth year as it may be the lot of the female to inhabit the frigid northern or the more genial southern climate; Sooner in Cities where relaxing luxury dwells, than in the rural cot of reason's love - percid joys.

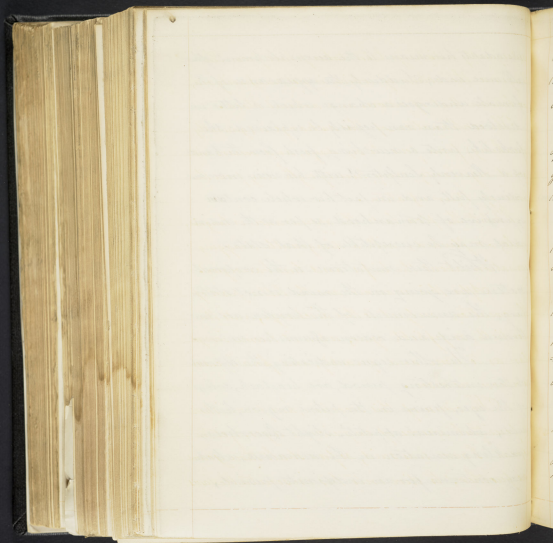
The evolution which at this time takes place is peculiarly interesting to the physician, poet, and philosopher, who accustomed to admire, and scan nature's works, beholds how admirably



she adapts her means to the accomplishment of all-wise ends; Suddenly the appearance of the female undergoes a change which is better understood than can possibly be explained; she looks like unto a new being, fresh from the hands of a Heavenly Sculptor! with her voice more melodiously full, and in fact her whole countenance expressive of womanhood, so far as the individual may be susceptible of that state.

Whilst these mutations in the corporeal system are going on the mind is not stationary, the amusements of the boyden are now thrown aside, and reason assumes her empire.

The other signs indicating the approach of this interesting period, are headach, dulging of the eyes, pains in the pelvic region, listlessness, whimsical appetite, slight Leucorrhoea, prickling sensation in the mammae, which may continue for an indefinite period,



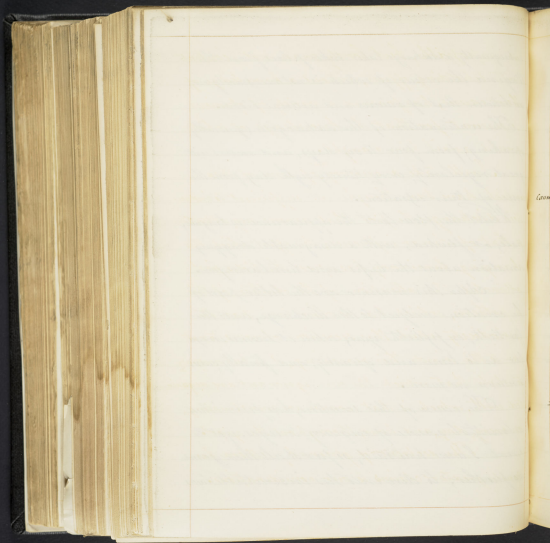
subsequently a discharge takes place from the Vagina the colour of which is not necessarily good, or between that of venous and arterial blood.

The continuation of this discharge is (generally speaking) from four to six days, and recurs with great regularity, every twenty-eight day from the time of their ovulation.

Whilst the flow lasts the appearance is languid, pale, or flushed, with a disagreeable dragging sensation about the hips and lumbar region.

After this manner are the better part of the creation subject to this discharge, unto the fortieth, or fiftieth year, when it becomes irregular as to time and quantity, and finally ceases to return no more.

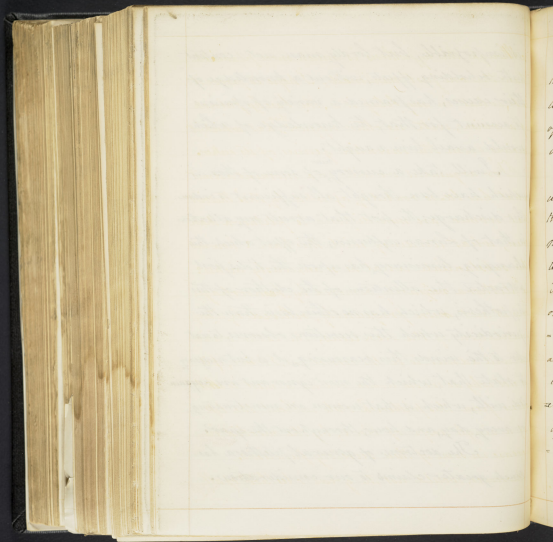
The cause of this secretion, has furnished a fruitful source of enquiry, to ages, yet the great Iamus has said, so far shall thou come no further, to dive into his inscrutable laws



is impossible, but hardly man not content with beholding effects, without a knowledge of their causes, has framed a variety of opinions to account for that, the knowledge of which, would avail him naught.

I will take a cursory ^{view} of some of these ^{causes} which have been thought all sufficient to induce this discharge; the first that arrests my attention is that of Lunar influence; the effect which this changing luminary has upon the tides, first attracted the attention of the author of this hypothesis, which has no other basis than the periodicity which this secretion observes, to cater to the winds this reasoning, it is but necessary to state that, which the most ignorant are acquainted with, which is that women are menstruating, on every day, and hour, throughout the year.

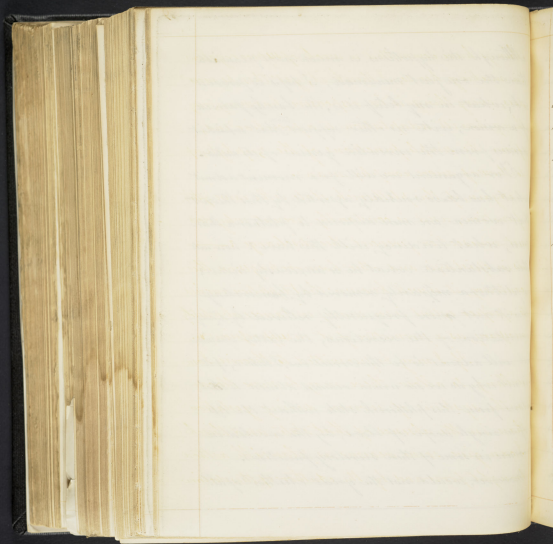
The doctrine of general plethora has much greater claims to our consideration.



Although this hypothesis is much more plausible than the one just mentioned, I hope to prove it to be, what in my belief it is, the baseless fabric of a vision, with no other support ^{than} that which it derives from the inventive genius of its author.

For argument we will for a moment admit what has been roughly asserted by this theorist that women are more disposed to plethora than men, what tendency, will this have? how will this substantiate what he so anxiously wishes? is plethora ~~more~~ removed by hemorrhage, or is it not more frequently relieved by augmentation of the secretions, the latter opinion all will admit to be the correct one, I believe, if it is not why do we see women reduced almost to skeletons from this plethorick state without the loss of a single drop of blood, by the morbid increase in some of their secretory functions.

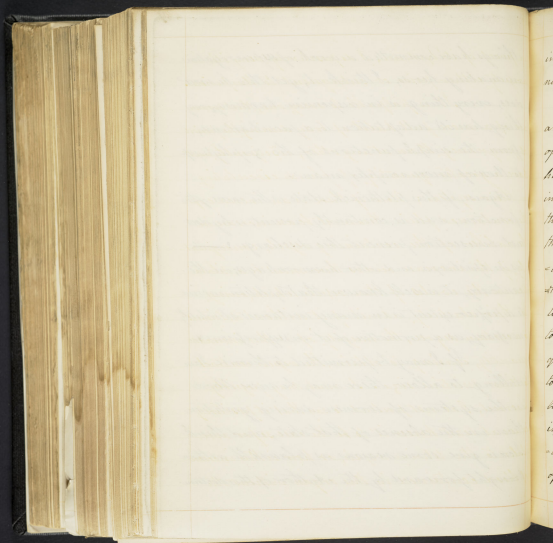
Moreover, would not the great author of all



things have committed a work of supererogation in making her so, I think it, yet this he does, every thing is in responsive harmony, every thing has its adaptation to a peculiar end, from the simple functions of the zoophyte, up to those of more complex man.

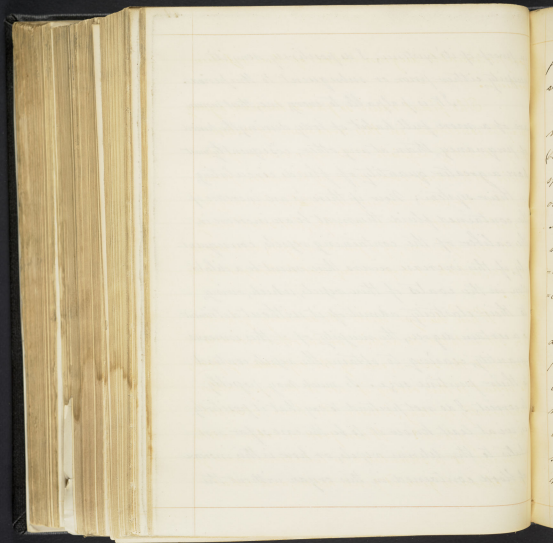
Again, if this plethorick state is the cause of this function, and is constantly present, why does not venisection prevent this discharge? — as in epistaxis and other haemorrhages; on the contrary, it is well known that depletion carried to a proper extent is in many instances absolutely necessary, as a promotive of it in suppression &c.

If I may be permitted to theorise I am willing to allow there may be more blood in the system of women during gestation than in the absence of that state, and think I can give some reasons as plausible as those brought forward by the Author of this doctrine.



in proof of its existence, I do positively deny its necessity either prior or subsequent to this period.

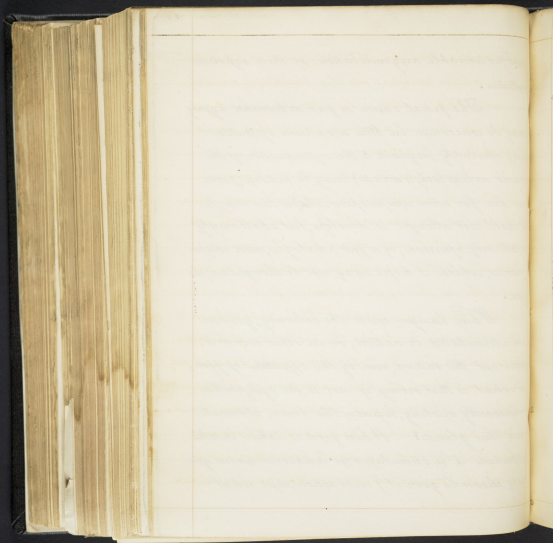
It is palpable to every one, that women are of a more full habit of body during the period of pregnancy, than at any other; consequently must have a greater quantity of fluids circulating in their system; Now if there is an increase of the contained fluid there must be an increase in the caliber of the containing vessels, consequently, if this increase occurs there must be a dilatation in the coats of these vessels, which, owing to their elasticity, admit of it without detriment to a certain degree, the necessity of of this increased quantity ceasing to obtain, the vessels contract to their pristine size. So much may possibly be correct, I do not pretend to say that it positively is, we at least know it to be the case so far as relates to the uterine vessels, or how is this increase of blood contained in this organ without the



proportionable augmentation of their rebelion
volumen.

The final cause so far as human agency
may be concerned in this arcanaum of Nature
(being absolutely requisite to the reproduction of the
species as has been proved) may be hidden from
our ken for some wise purpose ~~whether~~ this may be
I shall not attempt to develop, but shall merely
state my opinion, by a few analogies, and compa-
-risons, which I hope may not be thought misple-
-ced.

When hunger exists the salivary glands
are stimulated to action, or in other words to
pour out the saliva, even by the expectation of food,
to what is this owing if not to the sympathies
reciprocally existing between the brain, stomach
and these glands? When food is taken into the
stomach it is stimulated (or whatever name you
may choose to give it) into action, and what



phenomena have you, the pouring out of the gastric juice, mucus &c. what are these fluids? they certainly are not blood, neither is the stomach a gland, yet no one can deny it a secretory power; these are its physiological functions.

I might go on with such analogies with the liver, the kidney, and in fact with every viscus it would hold good with all, what does this go to prove but that each organ has its peculiar stimulus to the impression of which it is susceptible in the exact proportion to the development of the organ in question. The application of this reasoning is obvious, the evolution of the uterus takes place like that of other organs, consequently is susceptible of the full impression of its natural stimulus this acting is productive of menstruation—

Yet whither I! where has my subject borne me! far far beyond my depth or rather into a labyrinth I cannot retrace and through which I dare not proceed!

James